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COLOMBIA

SUCCESS STORY

A New Life: Urabá Family Forest Stewards Replace Illicit Crops

USAID/Colombia Helps Colombian Farmers Invest Their Time, Effort and Money in a Dependable Future

"The best part about the program is that there are *campesinos* who now understand agro-forestry. Illicit crops are being eliminated ... and we no longer have violence."

Enrique Rivera Pérez, Beneficiary Participant in the Colombia Forestry Development Program



The Colombian department (like a US state) of Urabá suffered for 20 years from desperate security problems. Illegal forces battled each other for control of land to grow illicit crops. Today, the situation is changing, thanks to a combination of aggressive anti-drug programs mounted by the Government of Colombia, and alternative development projects funded by USAID/ Colombia.

One successful USAID/ Colombia alternative development program in forestry began in late 2003, in Urabá's northern municipalities of Turbó and Necoclí. The Government of Colombia created the Familias Guardabosques (Family Forest Stewards) program to promote the planting and cultivation of *licit* crops where illegal crops had been manually eradicated. Under this program participating families were promised a one-time subsidy payment to ease the transition to *licit* production. The USAID/Colombia Forestry Development Program (CFDP) was created to help provide expertise and guidance for beneficiaries.

In 2004, in coordination with beneficiary families, USAID/ Colombia developed cocoa and rubber agroforestry demonstration parcels to show the economic potential of these species to participants, and to teach planting techniques, plant care and fertilizer applications. These plots continue to serve as plant nurseries, producing several seedling varieties of acacia, melina and teak, in addition

to cacao, rubber, and other crops on 15 hectares (37 acres) of communally-owned land. This also serves as a focal point for continuing training and community gatherings.

By helping beneficiary families band together and pool their resources and for investment in productive projects, the Colombia Forestry Development Program provided a business model for participating families. This model is now widely used to develop business plans for regional cocoa, rubber and forestry crops. Simultaneously, the CFDP interested private business firms in the opportunities represented by these projects.

Private sector response proved to be enthusiastic. Said one businessman, "We discovered well-organized cooperatives with a strong management structures engaged in consolidating their economic activities.

The boards were willing to work, *with* the members. That generated

confidence in our company to begin working with them. The cooperatives provided the labor to produce plant material and linked up with support and technical direction from us. This allowed us to transfer knowledge and technology to the community and refine their skills, leaving trained workers with an opportunity to develop as entrepreneurs."

More than 1,500 Colombians benefit from 10 community enterprises that have planted 679 hectares (1,677 acres) of agroforestry crops to date. Participants enthusiastically express their commitment to continue with the projects, and even to expand regional agroforestry beyond 2006.

According to beneficiary Enrique Rivera Pérez, "The best part about the program is that there are *campesinos* who now understand agro-forestry. Illicit crops are being eliminated ... and we no longer have violence. We wait in peace (to reap) the fruits of our land. We give thanks for sustenance, and we look forward to leaving something better for our children."



Beneficiary Trims Yearling Trees

Photo: Programa Forestal de Colombia

Telling Our Story

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